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SUBJECT: NOMINATION FOR FY08 TV CO-OP: REGIONAL TV STATION FOR
PROGRAM ON SMALL AGRICULTURAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IN AMERICA

REF: SECSTATE 016016

¶1. Post wishes to nominate Channel 11 Ubon Ratchathani for an FY08 TV co-op on the small agricultural business development in the United States. Post will support the TV co-op by funding international airfare and "I" visa fees for the team of three, which consists of two production crew members and one translator. Details follow.

¶2. Program Description: Channel 11 Ubon Ratchathani is a regional affiliate of the government-owned "Television of Thailand." It is the only television station that broadcasts in Isaan dialect, the language spoken by local populations in the northeast of Thailand. Channel 11 Ubon Ratchathani's programming reaches nearly 99 percent of the population in the region, and has an astonishing viewership share of almost 80 percent for its locally-generated programming, which airs three hours a day from 8:00-9:00am and from 4:00-6:00pm. (Note: The remaining 19 hours of daily content is centrally-produced in Bangkok or provided by private companies or local government agencies through rental of timeslots. End note.)

¶3. Following extensive discussions between Post and station management, Channel 11 Ubon Ratchathani proposes a ten-part series on "Small Agricultural Business Development in America." The ten, 15-minute segments will broadcast in both Isaan and Thai languages during the weekly primetime news in the nine lower northeastern provinces of Si Saket, Surin, Burirum, Yasothorn, Roi Et, Amnart Charoen, Mukdaharn, Nakhon Phanom and Ubon Ratchathani. Additional stand-alone footage gathered during the co-op will be included in separate primetime regional news and special reports aired on Channel 11 Ubon Ratchathani.

¶4. To undertake this effort, Channel 11 Ubon Ratchathani will send a two-person production crew to the United States for two weeks to visit a range of locations, including value-added agricultural production and processing enterprises, agricultural business development centers and cooperative agribusiness development organizations; and local academics and officials responsible for administering rural small business funding sources and providing technical assistance and business information for small, start-up agricultural business ventures. The crew also would like to visit rural agritourism and ecotourism projects so that they may incorporate aspects of business and financial planning, market research and development, and management techniques for this type of small business into their proposed series. If possible, the crew would also like to meet with Thai small and medium enterprise (SME) entrepreneurs in the United States as a means of learning from their unique-cultural perspective and knowledge in developing sound business and marketing plans during the initial start-up years.

¶5. Justification: In both a social and economic context, small and medium-sized enterprises are of overwhelming importance to Thailand's economy, especially following the financial and economic crisis of 1997. The majority of the more than nine million people

living in lower northeastern Thailand are farmers and, since the crash over a decade ago, many have had to look to small business as a means to cope the new economic landscape (e.g. increased competition from its neighbors, difficulties in securing financing, etc.). Research indicates that more than 60 percent of these new small businesses fail in the first five years due to a lack of management skills and business/financial planning on the part of the small business owner. It is necessary for those taking on a new business venture to develop sound business and marketing plans, as well as demonstrate financial prudence in order to guide their businesses through the difficult initial start-up years. These small business owners must possess and display strong management skills and the ability to convince potential lenders to finance their new ventures. This TV Co-op will provide Channel 11 Ubon Ratchathani with material to educate viewers on the many issues that must be considered before launching a small agricultural business, including how to develop business and marketing plans, secure financing, conduct feasibility studies and market research, along with other important themes.

¶6. This program presents an excellent opportunity for PA Bangkok to demonstrate to our commitment to and support for this huge rural population in Thailand. We continue to actively initiate outreach programs to foster better understanding between the United States and local communities outside Bangkok, as well as to advance the economic condition of these populations. The efforts, however, have been hindered in the past by the lack of language ability among media, particularly those in the underprivileged northeast, making it difficult for many influential reporters from this area to participate in USG-sponsored co-ops and reporting tours. As evidence of the importance we place on this program and reaching out to rural populations, Post has agreed to allocate one of its locally-engaged staff to serve as a translator/interpreter in order to ensure this TV co-op is a success.

¶7. Crew Names: Mr. Saengthong Anantapak, Producer, Channel 11 Ubon Ratchathani and Mr. Samphan Ratanaphirom, Cameraman, Channel 11 Ubon Ratchathani. Saengthong and Samphan do not have a good command of English, therefore post will send a locally-engaged staff member to serve as translator/interpreter for the crew. As Chief of Production, Saengthong is responsible for overseeing regional primetime programming. His target features and documentaries, which reach an estimated audience of more than nine million, aim to provide educational and informative programming to help local populations develop a means of self-sustainment to achieve a higher standard of standard of living. Post will support the program by funding international airfare, as well as "I" visa application and issuance fees for the production crew and translator.

¶8. Program Suggestions: The team from Channel 11 Ubon Ratchathani would like to travel to states where they can film locations related to and interview subjects involved in value-added agricultural production and processing activities, as well as conduct visits to agricultural business centers and cooperative agribusiness development institutes. The crew also would like to speak to successful small agricultural business and agribusiness entrepreneurs, government officials and academics who deal with government policy on small agricultural business development, and individuals who are engaged in rural agritourism and ecotourism. Ideally, they would also like to speak to members of the Thai community in the United States involved in any of the aforementioned activities.

¶9. Proposed Date of Program: Q3/Q4 FY2008; Depart for U.S. after June 15, 2008.

¶10. POC for this project is AIO Cynthia A. Brown. Telephone 66-2-205-4241, 66-2-205-4415; Fax 66-2-650-8919; and email:BrownCA@state.gov

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